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QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 0944

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SA, LE

SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA AND LEBANON

SUMMARY: AS THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON INCREASED IN FEROCITY
AND ASSUMED AN INCREASINGLY CONFESSIONAL CHARACTER (AS
OPPOSED TO A LEFT-RIGHT CONFLICT) THE SAUDIS, INCLUDING HIGH
OFFICIALS, HAVE BECOME SHARPLY CRITICAL OF THE LEBANESE
CHRISTIANS AND HAVE PROGRESSIVELY COME TO IDENTIFY WITH THE
MUSLIM SIDE. THE CURRENT CEASEFIRE IMPOSED BY SYRIA--AN
ACTION SAUDI ARABIA SUPPORTS--PROBABLY CAME JUST IN TIME TO
KEEP THIS SHIFT IN SENTIMENT FROM BEING MORE OPENLY MANI-
FESTED IN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS. IN THE EVENT OF
A RENEWAL OF FIGHTING WHICH COULD BE PLAUSIBLY BLAMED ON

CHRISTIAN INTRANSCENDENCE, THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WOULD FACE
AT LEAST PASSIVE SAUDI HOSTILITY. REGARDLESS OF THE CAUSE
OF ANY BREAKDOWN OF THE CEASEFIRE THE CHRISTIANS WOULD NO
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LONGER BE ABLE TO COUNT ON SAUDI SYMPATHY. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSIDERING THE STRONG WAHHABI MUSLIM TRADITIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA THERE HAS BEEN SOMETHING UNUSUAL AND REFRESHING IN THE SPECIAL AFFECTION (MIXED TO BE SURE WITH A CERTAIN CONTEMPT) WHICH THE SAUDIS HAVE HAD FOR LEBANON AND ITS UNIQUE SYSTEM. IT HAS AT TIMES SEEMED THAT THE SAUDIS GOT ON BETTER WITH THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS OF LEBANON THAN WITH THE MUSLIMS. THIS REFLECTS THE WIDELY HELD VIEW THAT THE SHIA LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN SELF-SERVING, INEFFECTIVE AND CORRUPT (AND ONLY SHIA ANYHOW) WHILE THE TRADITIONAL SUNNI LEADERSHIP, IN SAUDI EYES ADMIRABLE IN MANY WAYS, HAS OVER THE YEARS STEADILY LOST CONTROL OF ITS CONSTITUENCY TO LEFTIST RABBLE ROUSERS. THIS HAS LEFT THE CHRISTIANS, WITH ALL THEIR FAULTS, AS THE BACKBONE OF AN ANTI-COMMUNIST, FREE-ENTERPRISE ORIENTED SOCIETY WHICH HAS NOT JUST INCIDENTALLY PROVIDED A PLEASANT SPOT FOR VACATIONS AND THE EDUCATION OF SAUDI CHILDREN. MOREOVER, THE SAUDIS HAVE LIKED THE IDEA OF LEBANON AS A SHOWCASE FOR THE WORLD OF AN ARAB COUNTRY IN WHICH CHRISTIAN, MUSLIM AND JEW CAN LIVE IN HARMONY.

2. SAUDI ARABIA, MOREOVER, HAS A LONG HISTORY OF INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. OVER THE YEAR CONSERVATIVE LEBANESE POLITICIANS, BOTH CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM HAVE REGULARLY VISITED SAUDI ARABIA, FREQUENTLY AS THE PAMPERED GUESTS OF NATIONAL GUARD COMMANDER AND SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRINCE ABDULLAH BIN ABD AL AZIZ. KATA'EB LEADER GEMAYEL HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MORE REGULAR VISITORS. IT IS A WELL KNOWN SECRET THAT THE CONSERVATIVE BEIRUT DAILY AL HAYAT HAS LONG SURVIVED ON A SAUDI SUBSIDY AND IT IS WIDELY ASSUMED THAT MANY CONSERVATIVE LEBANESE POLITICIANS, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM, HAVE WON ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT BY A MARGIN OF VOTES BOUGHT WITH SAUDI MONEY.

3. THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP HAS A SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB POLITICS AND HAS BEEN WELL INFORMED ON EVENTS IN LEBANON. WELL INTO THE FOURTH ROUND OF FIGHTING THE SAUDIS REGARDED THE STRUGGLE AS LESS RELIGIOUS THAN AS BASICALLY POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC--A CONTEST BETWEEN THE HAVES AND THE HAVE-NOTS. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THE SAUDIS SHOWED CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY FOR THE HAVES, REGARDLESS OF THEIR RELIGION, CONFIDENTIAL

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LARGELY BECAUSE THEY KNEW AND DID NOT MUCH LIKE MANY OF THE HAVE-NOTS. THEY HAVE LONG CONSIDERED QULAYLAT, FOR INSTANCE, A MURDERING THUG, AND MOST OF THE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS WOULD BE ARRESTED IF THEY SET FOOT IN THE KINGDOM. THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN FULLY AWARE THAN AN ANOMOLOUS SITUATION HAD DEVELOPED IN LEBANON WHERE A CHRISTIAN MINORITY CONTROLLED THE BULK OF THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH AND POWER. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT A SITUATION WHICH APPEARED GREATLY TO DISTURB THEM; THE

CHRISTIANS WERE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES THE BEST STEWARDS OF LEBANON'S DESTINY.

4. SAUDI ATTITUDES BEGAN TO CHANGE RATHER SHARPLY WHEN THE FIGHTING TOOK ON AN ALMOST PURELY CONFESSIONAL CHARACTER IN LATE DECEMBER AND EARLY JANUARY AND PARTICULARLY WHEN AT THAT TIME THE CHRISTIANS BEGAN TO TALK MORE OPENLY OF PARTITION. THE SAUDI PRESS--NOT KNOWN FOR ITS COURAGE OR INDEPENDENCE

BUT NOT DIRECTLY GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED--WAS PROBABLY GIVEN ITS HEAD IN REPORTING AND COMMENTING ON LEBANESE EVENTS. AS THE FEROCITY OF THE FIGHTING INCREASED THE QUITE NEUTRAL TERM "LEFTIST/MUSLIM" WAS DROPPED IN FAVOR OF "NATIONALIST FORCES." THE "RIGHTIST/CHRISTIANS" BECAME GUNMEN, MURDERERS AND WORSE--THE WORST PROBABLY BEING "CRUSADER." A WHOLE SERIES OF EDITORIALS DECRIED CHRISTIAN SAVAGERY. THIS SHIFT IN OPINION TOOK PLACE QUITE RAPIDLY BUT OVER A PERIOD OF TIME; THERE WAS NO REAL TURNING POINT. IF ONE HAD TO BE FOUND, HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE THE PUBLICATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL HEARALD TRIBUNE OF A PHOTOGRAPH OF A CHRISTIAN MILITIAMAN WEARING A LARGE CROSS PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED ON THE CHEST GUARDING A FILE OF MUSLIM PRISONERS, HANDS ON HEAD, WHO HAD BEEN CAPTURED IN THE SIEGE OF KARANTINA. THE REACTION HERE TO THAT PICTURE WAS STRONG EVEN AMONG HERETOFORE COOL-HEADED SENIOR OFFICIALS. (WE SUSPECT THERE WAS A SENSE OF HUMILIATION AT THE SIGHT OF A LONE CHRISTIAN HOLDING NUMEROUS MUSLIMS IN A POSTURE OF SUBMISSION.) THE SHIFT IN THE OFFICIAL ATTITUDE WAS MARKED BY THE DECISION TO SEND FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES TO ASSIST NEEDY PALESTINIANS--A DECISION ANNOUNCED SOON AFTER THE BLOCKADE OF THE TEL ZA'ATAR REFUGEE CAMP AND A DIRECT RESPONSE TO THAT CHRISTIAN ACTION.

4. THE TALK OF PARTITION WHICH WAS INCREASINGLY HEARD FROM CONFIDENTIAL

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CHRISTIAN CIRCLES AS THE FIGHTING INTENSIFIED ALSO HAD AN IMPACT, PARTICULARLY ON SAUDI OFFICIALS. THE SAUDIS HAVE HAD NO DIFFICULTY ACCEPTING THE UNIQUENESS OF LEBANON WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD; BUT THEY CANNOT ACCEPT THAT ANY PART OF LEBANON IS NOT A PART OF THE ARAB WORLD. THE SUGGESTION THAT IT MIGHT NOT BE ARAB STRUCK A CHORD OF ARAB NATIONALISM NOT ALWAYS EVIDENT IN A PEOPLE SO SELF-CONFIDENT IN THEIR ARABISM THAT THEY SELDOM WORRY ABOUT DEMONSTRATING IT. IN A MORE PRACTICAL SENSE, THE SAUDIS COULD NOT IMAGINE A CHRISTIAN MINI-LEBANON SURVIVING WITHOUT BECOMING A CLIENT AND INTERNATIONAL PAWN OF ISRAEL--A SITUATION THEY VIEWED AS CERTAIN TO INCREASE THE VOLATILITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST EQUATION AND COMPLICATE CHANCES FOR AN EARLY PEACE SETTLEMENT.

5. THE SAUDIS AND SYRIANS HAVE OFTEN BEEN ADVERSARIES IN

THE LONG, TANGLED HISTORY OF FOREIGN MEDDLING IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. IN THE PRESENT CASE, HOWEVER, THE SAG SUPPORTED THE SYRIAN/PLA INTERVENTION BECAUSE IT SAW NO ALTERNATIVE WAY OF STOPPING THE FIGHTING. ITS OWN PREFERENCE FOR A MORE BROADLY-BASED ARAB INTERVENTION WAS NOT PRACTICABLE. THE SAG WOULD NOT FAVOR A PERMANENT SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON AND WOULD HOPE THAT UNDER A SUITABLE PROGRAM OF REFORMS FULL CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN AFFAIRS COULD BE TURNED BACK TO THE LEBANESE SOON.

6. GIVEN THE CURRENT MOOD HERE, THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO AVOID A SHARE OF THE BLAME IN SAUDI EYES IF THE CEASEFIRE COMES APART. REGARDLESS OF THE REASON FOR THE BREAKDOWN THEY COULD CERTAINLY NO LONGER EXPECT ANY PRACTICAL SAUDI HELP IN DEFENDING THEIR CAUSE. IF THE CHRISTIANS ARE CLEARLY TO BLAME FOR A RENEWED OUTBREAK OF

FIGHTING THEY SHOULD AT A MINIMUM EXPECT PASSIVE SAUDI HOSTILITY. ONE WAY THIS HOSTILITY COULD BE REFLECTED WOULD BE IN ACTIONS AGAINST LEBANESE CHRISTIANS LIVING IN OR DOING BUSINESS WITH SAUDI ARABIA. THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT CONCERN OVER SAUDI REACTION IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FORCES KEEPING CERTAIN PALESTINIAN GROUPINGS RELATIVELY MODERATE. THE RESULTS COULD BE FAR-REACHING IF THE SAG WERE TO LET IT BE KNOWN, ESPECIALLY TO ARAFAT AND THE PLO, THAT SAUDI ARABIA IS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN
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"MODERATION" WHERE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS ARE INVOLVED.

7. ONE CONSTANT THROUGHOUT LEBANON'S RECENT AGONY APPEARS FROM HERE TO HAVE BEEN THE UNSHAKABLE CONFIDENCE OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS THAT DESPITE THEIR OWN ACTIONS SOME OUTSIDE FORCE WILL COME TO THEIR RESCUE AND STAVE OFF DISASTER. THEY SHOULD NO LONGER BE UNDER ANY ILLUSIONS THAT HELP MIGHT COME FROM SAUDI ARABIA.
PORTER

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